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STATE FOR R, P, NEA/PPD, NEA, PRM, OES, PLS PASS TO USAID

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: COMBATING EXTREMISM - JORDAN

REF: STATE 159129

Classified By: Charge David Hale, Reasons 1.4 (B) & (D)

1. (S) Summary: Embassy Amman has been working to strengthen local traditions of dialogue, tolerance, and intellectual exchange as foils against extremist ideas - and to help such values emerge where they are absent - for several years. We use a wide panoply of State Department and other USG programs to counter extremism. In Jordan, we have a host government and many local decision-makers among the elite who share this goal, and understand the vital importance of these efforts. Many of the USG programs came into existence following 9/11, but others have been in place for years as an ongoing part of USG efforts in Jordan and in the region. Local NGOs and civil society and elite groups that we engage on such issues number perhaps less than 100, but the audience that they reach includes the vast majority of Jordanians. Our efforts to maximize media coverage for these activities, as well as the influence of returned exchange visitors and other beneficiaries, encompass all of Jordan. To ensure maximum effectiveness, it is essential that these programs continue to receive support so they are not seen as simply short-term efforts to address the symptoms of the problems of extremism, but rather as part of an ongoing long-term dialogue between cultures and faiths meant to truly enhance mutual understanding. END SUMMARY.

ENABLING LOCAL ATMOSPHERE

2. (SBU) The Government of Jordan has an existential interest in combating Al-Qaeda-style extremism, and has actively supported fora for tolerance and religious education during the last year. In November of 2004, Jordan launched the Amman Message, which argued that authentic Islamic traditions call for respect for others, tolerance, freedom of conscience, and the rejection of extremism. The campaign continued with the International Islamic Conference July 4-5, which hosted 170 Muslim scholars. Its closing communique, endorsed by authorities ranging from Sheikh Tantawi of Al-Azhar to Grand Ayatollah Sistani from Iraq, denounced key elements of Al-Qaeda's ideology.

3. (S) In September 2005, King Abdullah met with Pope Benedict XVI and called for continuing interfaith dialogue, coexistence, and shared values between civilizations. Later in September, the King addressed similar issues before an audience at Catholic University in Washington, and discussed what he called Islam's true values of tolerance and understanding with a group of students at Banneker High School in Washington, DC. This message receives wide play in the Jordanian and international media as well. The Charge, d'Affaires DCM, political section, and Public Affairs Office all meet with local officials regularly to provide feedback and suggestions on this message and on possible international audiences which would be receptive. Though these efforts are necessarily and must remain behind the scenes, we believe they are important, as the Palace regularly looks to the Embassy for reassurance of the importance of this message of tolerance to the USG.

EDUCATION

4. (SBU) Already boasting high literacy (90 percent) and a secular education system, Jordan has taken the lead on education reform in the region through its two flagship reform programs: the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy program (ErKKE) and the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI). Both directly support the Government of Jordan's policy of using the school system to promote tolerance and advance a modern, outward looking attitude among Jordanian citizens. Initiated with USG assistance, these multi-donor programs seek to transform the way the GOJ provides educational services, and to prepare youth for the challenges of the modern job market. Through programs supported by USAID, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and Embassy Amman's Public Affairs Office, the USG will provide assistance valued at more than 45 million USD between FY 2005) FY 2008 to support these education reforms. U.S. assistance is working to: connect Jordan's public schools to

broad band internet; rapidly introduce advanced IT equipments in to the classroom; develop modern digitized curricula to promote tolerance and improve English language education; train teachers to better instill creative thinking and leadership skills within Jordan's youth; support internet-based & open pal8 exchanges between Jordanian and American youth; enhance gender mainstreaming in new curriculum; and fund extra-curricular programs that provide youth, mostly female, with IT skills that are in high demand in today's modern labor market. These programs expose Jordanians to new ideas that promote tolerance and a more outwardly focused perspective. Most importantly, these activities are effective tools for preparing Jordanian youth for the challenges of the modern job market, decreasing poverty and diminishing the draw of extremist ideologies. As a result of these programs, the GOJ has already registered increased international test scores for students in math and science (and is now witnessing an unexpected movement of students from Jordan's highly touted private sector school system to newly respected public ones.)

15. (SBU) Embassy Amman also hosts the State Department's regional environment, science, and technology (EST) hub office. Through programs in Jordan and throughout the region, our EST office works to support scientific education and research as a source of understanding and tolerance. By facilitating linkages in these fields, the EST office helps keep the region involved and engaged in global developments in these areas. In September 2005, EST and PA Amman supported an international conference in Amman on & Engaging Iraq's Science and Technology Community in Developing Iraq, a conference which highlighted the need for scientists to participate in nation building and in regional and global cooperation to ensure a logical and scientific basis for national policies.

16. (SBU) PA Jordan hosts the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA), which has responsibilities for a number of countries in the region. PA Jordan also hosts the only PA-run direct English Language Teaching Program in NEA, the American Language Center. PA's ALC teaches approximately 700 Jordanians, including many university students, American English with cultural content each session. For the past two summers, ALC has also reached out to younger students and run summer sessions for High School students. AMIDEAST has also begun teaching American English with cultural content over the past two years, including similar summer sessions for youth. By directly offering and/or sponsoring regional participation in training focusing on curriculum content, the Jordan-based RELO encourages the development of a strong, professional, and internationally focused English language teaching program at all levels of Jordan's educational system. For example, the RELO runs ECA's English Language Fellow program in the region, which places American TESL teachers to local training institutions, as well as the Foreign Language Teacher Assistants program in the region, which sends approximately a dozen regional English teaching students to the US to study and teach. PA Jordan looks forward to joining ECA's successful micro scholarship program in the coming year, to help sponsor disenfranchised and/or marginalized Jordanian students to study American English. Post supplements these RELO activities with a number of other exchanges, including IV programs focused on TESL and a wide distribution of the excellent ECA ET magazine, ET Forum.

17. (SBU) International exchange is another tool to fight extremism, engage Jordanians in an international dialogue, and encourage modern, quality education. PA Jordan supports an active Binational Fulbright Commission, the local AMIDEAST office, and the American Center for Oriental Research in Jordan, all of which have hosted myriad programs, trainings, and exchanges over many years focusing on education, dialogue, and tolerance. AMIDEAST runs a number of active youth exchange programs, through ECA and MEPI funding, including participation by a dozen Jordanian high school students in a summer youth camp in the US, the YES high school scholarship program for approximately 30 Jordanian students per year, among others. AMIDEAST also provides educational advising for Jordanian students, some 1800 of whom travel to the US to study at the university level each year (though this number is now at a nearly historic low, with numbers falling drastically from nearly 2500 in 2001 to just over 1800 this year). These local partners also support the PLUS partnership for learning scholars which sends about 5 Jordanians per year to study in the US, the Iearn and LINC exchanges, and others. The Royal Hashemite Court funds its own scholarship program to send meritorious Jordanian students to study in the U.S. and other nations, managing the program in cooperation with AMIDEAST. These international exchange programs, like the programs mentioned above, encourage a global outlook and active engagement in the broader world community. They are also of particular importance since they target youth.

YOUTH

18. (SBU) As well as supporting the educational efforts mentioned above, PA Jordan has an active and long-standing exchange program that focuses on youth leadership. We have sent many university student leaders on International Visitor Regional Programs as well as on post-designed single-country group exchange visits funded by post. 14 university students are currently in the US on a post-developed and -funded group exchange program. PA Jordan has also facilitated and/or sponsored the participation of a number of Jordanian youth leaders in regional MEPI conferences and programs: four Jordanian students attended the MEPI alumni conference for Young Leaders held in Tunis in January 2005. MEPI has been very active in the area of youth outreach and developing youth leadership skills in Jordan. Post is also an active supporter of the Seeds of Peace summer camp program and the its training seminars offshoots. PA Jordan distributes 2000 copies of &Hi!8 magazine to Jordanian youth through distribution points such as universities, American Corners, and AMIDEAST, and is finding that demand is growing, particularly as we work to ensure that all youth exchange alumni are added to the distribution list.

----- TOLERANCE AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE -----

19. (SBU) PA Jordan's exchange program also focuses on issues of interfaith dialogue. In November 2004, we sent a Jordanian mufti on a regional program focused on &Promoting Interfaith Dialogue.8 PA Jordan also sponsored a post-developed and -funded international group exchange program for a group of Sharia Court judges in September 2005, and a similar group of interfaith clerics working on dialogue issues in spring 2005. Through local PA and USAID-provided funding, PA Jordan also supports follow-on efforts by local NGOs active in this field, sponsoring workshops, outreach, and seminars.

110. (SBU) For the past three years, successive PAOs have developed an active and ongoing dialogue with leaders of informal social groups (akin to Gulfi Diwaniyya's with Islamist/Muslim Brotherhood leanings who regularly bring together twenty-something, lower middle class youth to discuss US policies and society. As well as providing an unparalleled sounding board for local reaction to US policies, these fora provide PAOs the opportunity to set the record straight regarding misperceptions and mis/disinformation about US actions. For an even longer period dating back to the 90,s, PAOs have also had active relationships with media figures and Op-Ed writers reflecting Islamist opinion and thinking. Several Embassy sections annually host series of Iftar dinners during Ramadan to share in the celebration of the month and to mark American respect for it and for Islamic traditions.

----- MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE -----

111. (SBU) In Jordan, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funds both national and regional programs supporting reform on political, economic, and educational issues. These reforms should ultimately lead to a more open, participatory, and economically successful Jordan, developments that will help combat extremism and encourage positive global engagement. From FY02 through FY04, MEPI funding in Jordan totaled over 14 million USD. MEPI programs strengthened Jordanian political parties and Parliament, encouraged transparency and the rule of law (including efforts to enhance corporate good governance), empowered Jordan's media and women, and strengthened Jordan's educational system. For example, Arab Civitas, the Jordan Education Initiative Discovery Schools, &My Arabic Library,8 and &English in a Box8 kits, all helped reinforce the teaching of civic rights and responsibilities and democratic values in Jordanian primary and secondary schools.

----- FOCUS ON PALESTINIAN REFUGEES -----

112. (SBU) Embassy Amman hosts the regional refugee coordinator's office, and follows refugee and Palestinian issues particularly carefully. Jordanians of Palestinian origin form the majority of Jordan's population. Attitudes of Palestinians are therefore particularly important, especially regarding issues of extremism. The UNRWA program supported by the USG here in Jordan, like many of the programs listed above, focuses on the key role of education in combating extremism.

113. (SBU) UNRWA: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) -- the UN

Agency that was established in 1950 to provide housing, education, health, and social services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (currently about 4.26 million persons))- is currently implementing one project in Jordan with special U.S. project funding from the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account that have been designed specifically to combat extremism in Palestinian refugee camps:

-- LONG-TERM TOLERANCE PROJECT: UNRWA is introducing mandatory, supplemental curricula in its primary and tertiary schools that teaches conflict resolution, human rights awareness and promotes gender equality. (NOTE: UNRWA has no stand-alone curricula. Per agreement with refugee hosting nations/authorities, its schools teach either the Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian or Palestinian Authority curricula. END NOTE.) UNRWA's program introduces internet activities, worksheets, storybooks, and games with a tolerance promotion message into every access point it can identify in the host nation curricula (for example, in Social Science, Arabic and Religion classes), and also attempts for long-term impact by providing remedial training not just to UNRWA teachers, but to school supervisors and UNRWA's teacher trainees. State's PRM bureau provided \$1.6 million from 1999-2004 (Germany also provided \$465,000) to help UNRWA launch this program as a pilot in the West Bank/Gaza (1999), expand it to all of its schools in the WB/Gaza (2000-2002), and introduce a second pilot in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (2003-2004). PRM is currently providing \$589,000 in MRA funds to expand this project to all 652 UNRWA schools - a target population of 500,000 primary students, 16,000 teachers, 950 head teachers, 250 school supervisors, 530 vocational training center instructors, 5,300 vocational training students, 55 teacher training instructors and 1,100 teacher trainees. UNRWA has conducted attitudinal surveys before expanding its pilot programs. Amman refcoord and German donors have also conducted external reviews that suggest this tolerance program may also be having a positive collateral impact. Syria's Education Minister, for example, recently agreed to remove some school texts that UNRWA's tolerance program managers have identified as incendiary.

14. (SBU) AMBASSADORS, FUND FOR REFUGEES: PRM expanded its small (under \$20,000) quick-impact grassroots NGO program, the Ambassador Fund for Refugees, to the Middle East in 2002. Four of the five projects currently being implemented in this region built computer centers in camps in Jordan, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria for Palestinian refugee women who have had limited access to the Internet due to strong social prohibitions that prevent them from utilizing the same facilities as men. PRM has authorized funding for a similar women-only Internet cafe to be opened in Jordan in 2005-2006.

----- ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES -----

15. (SBU) The United States established a special trading relationship with Jordan in 1998 under the Qualifying Industrial Zone (QIZ) program, which requires goods to have Israeli content. The U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement became the first U.S. FTA with an Arab nation in 2001. Both give "Made in Jordan" products preferential access to the U.S. market and aim to support export-driven economic development. Together with other forms of U.S. assistance to build Jordan's capacity to compete in global markets, these trade agreements will help the GOJ meet the goal of adding 50,000 jobs to the economy annually, which in turn is critical in combating unemployment and the extremism upon which it thrives.

--QIZ factories employ some 23,000 Jordanians, mostly in the garment industry. For the majority women workers, these jobs represent a source of independent income, increased social standing, and empowerment. For the large number of rural families, these jobs have a significant positive impact on well-being.

--Trade-based economic development will bring with it diversification, including in more technical fields such as ICT and pharmaceuticals, fields where Jordan has already made a mark. Enhanced trade will demand more vocational training, a more highly skilled workforce, and increasing numbers of managers. U.S. trade policies toward Jordan have already shown a path for development of the nation's economy, and offer hope to younger generations. By highlighting the benefits of U.S.-Jordan trade, the Embassy will continue to deliver that message of hope to Jordanians.

16. (SBU) Spurring economic growth throughout the Jordanian economy is a major objective of our USAID program. The Jordanian leadership recognizes that a small, resource-poor country must do everything it can to enhance its competitive position, and provide its citizens the ability to be players in the global economy. Economic reforms supported by the USG over the last several years have significantly changed the

structure of the Jordanian economy, moving it from a statist orientation to one which is much more market-oriented and supportive of private sector growth. These reforms have boosted economic growth rates and provided opportunities and hope to Jordan's citizens. Maintaining those growth rates and sustaining hope are critical to blunting the appeal of extremist ideologies.

CONCLUSION

17. (S) The USG is fortunate in Jordan to be working on these essential issues with engaged and effective local partners, from King Abdullah, his advisors, and the government, to local NGOs, academic institutions, and energetic youth leaders. Jordanians understand that it is the common man and woman in the Muslim world who is the most likely to suffer directly from extremism and from terrorist violence. As they see it, it is their religion and their traditions that are being hijacked by this extremism. While the USG is not well-positioned to become directly involved in the philosophical debate within Islam over the future of Islam and Muslim-majority societies, we can help support those elements within these societies who are proponents for tolerance, engagement, and dialogue. In Jordan, we have been working to give them the tools and experience to help them win in this battle. To be successful, our efforts must be long-range, continuous, and well thought-out. It must be clear to our partners that we are in this for the long-term.
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